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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concept of creativity through the identification of traits and characteristics found in the so-called creative personality. The works on creativity of several scholars and researchers are briefly reviewed, including those by Ellis Paul Torrance, Donald W. MacKinnon, Sarnoff A. Mednick, Paul Heist, Philip Wesley Jackson, and J. P. Guilford. An attempt is made to explain how the concept of creativity might be useful for reading and study skills specialists, especially those interested in understanding how the creative process could be used with "underdeveloped" students. (RL)

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About Creativity and Study Skills:
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About Creativity and Study Skills:

Some Observations and Thoughts

Creativity, as a term used to explain human activity, has many meanings. One interpretation found in the Dictionary of the Social Sciences (Reading, 1977) explains creativity is the ability to be imaginative and original in the handling of words, ideas, and materials. Will Durant (1978) said the most essential thing in the universe is creative power. Aldous Huxley (1929, p. 223) said, "Creative work, of however humble a kind, is the source of man's most solid, least transitory happiness." Respected scholars such as Ellis Paul Torrance, Donald W. MacKinnon, Sarnoff A. Mednick, Paul Heist, Philip Wesley Jackson and Joy Paul Guilford have studied creativity, and their findings will be briefly reviewed.

In 1950, J. P. Guilford made a presidential address on "Creativity" to the American Psychological Association. This address stimulated interest in creativity, and during the late 1950s and early 1960s research on creativity for education began to appear in print. "Almost without exception, the conclusions seemed to be that those with creative potential are neglected, if not discriminated against, at all levels of American education" (MacKinnon, 1968, p. 149). For Professor Guilford, divergent thinking is one of the most important ingredients of creativity (Guilford, 1957 and 1959).

Three significant characteristics of divergent thinking are flexibility, originality, and fluency; or the ability to produce rapidly a succession of ideas that meet some requirements (Arieti, 1976).

E. Paul Torrance has been involved in the study of creativity for the past 25 years - its nature, measurement, and training. Torrance has concluded that many kinds of talent, including creative talent, exist in most populations at any given time. As a contribution to education, Torrance has attempted to help teachers identify and promote creativity in the classroom. Some observable signs of creative behavior in the classroom, according to Torrance, are:

- Intense absorption in listening, observing, doing.
- Intense animation and physical involvement.
- Challenging ideas of authorities.
- Checking many sources of information.
- Taking a close look at things.
- Eagerly telling others about one's discoveries.
- Continuing a creative activity after the scheduled time for quitting.
- Showing relationships among apparently unrelated ideas.
- Following through on ideas set in motion.
- Manifesting curiosity, wanting to know, digging deeper.
- Guessing or predicting outcomes and then testing them.

- Honestly and intensely searching for the truth.
- Resisting distractions.
- Losing awareness of time.
- Penetrating observations and questions.
- Seeking alternatives and exploring new possibilities (Torrance, 1971).

Torrance (1960) found a weak relationship between creative thinking and generalized ability as measured by intelligence tests (Getzels and Jackson, 1962, also found this weak relationship). Certain childlike (usually called childish) mental operations are demonstrably essential to creativity, among them playfulness, wishfulness, spontaneity, approximation, and free-floating openness of mind. In summarizing some of his research, Torrance said the most exciting insight was that different kinds of students learn best when given opportunities to learn in ways best suited to their motivations and abilities. "Whenever teachers change their ways of teaching in significant ways, a different group of learners become the stars or 'high achievers'" (Torrance, 1967, p. 88).

Donald W. MacKinnon, while conducting research at the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research within the University of California at Berkeley, has identified the creative person as: relatively uninterested in small details, or in facts for their own sake, and more concerned with their meanings and implications, possessed of considerable cognitive flexibility, verbally skillful, interested in communicating with others and accurate in so doing,

intellectually curious, and relatively disinterested in policing either their own impulses and images or those of others (MacKinnon, 1967). MacKinnon also said one of the most salient characteristics of the creative person is his courage. "Since the creative person is not preoccupied with the impression he makes on others, and is not overly concerned with their opinion of him, he is freer than most to be himself" (MacKinnon, 1967, p. 27).

In 1960, MacKinnon had published an article titled, "The Highly Effective Individual," and he conceived of two variables from numerous sources as being central and determinative of the highly effective individual:

1. Emotional stability or personal soundness.
2. Creativity of thought and action.

MacKinnon also found that creative people not only experience more anxiety, they also have stronger egos and have a perceptual preference for the complex and asymmetrical; they prefer the richness of the disordered to the stark barrenness of the simple and show a preference for intuition. "In all the groups we have studied we have found that self-image and ego-ideal are of crucial importance in determining the level of creativeness with which a person lives his life and practices his profession..." (MacKinnon, 1967, p. 24).

In regard to education, MacKinnon said, "The concept of educating for creativity necessitates our thinking of it not as a fixed trait of personality but as something that changes over time,

waxing and waning, being facilitated by some life circumstances and situations and inhibited by others" (MacKinnon, 1968, p. 150). Study skills professionals are most certainly interested in promoting those circumstances that are related to constructive supportive approaches. Often it is a creative challenge for the study skills teacher to find the best approach for each student.

Paul Heist (1967 and 1968) has identified the creative person as: independent, innovative, flexible, with a highly developed sense of the theoretical and the esthetic, and exercising discipline only when he consideres it necessary. Philip Wesley Jackson and Samual Messick (1967) found at the level of everyday experience that creative expression of the highest quality tends to come from people who limit their efforts to a single mode of expression. The professional writer, researcher, singer, actor, and educator (reading and study skills specialist) might be good examples. Sarnoff A. Mednick (1962) introduces the concept of usefulness within the dimension of creativity, and this is most important for educators and students. Mednick maintains that the answer 7,363,474 to the question, "How much is 12 and 12?" is original but not creative, because it is not useful within accepted mathematical conventions.

Nevitt Sanford studied the research accomplished by MacKinnon that indicates most creative people are distinguished from less creative ones by greater flexibility of thinking, breath of perspective, openness to experience, freedom of impulse, breadth of interest, autonomy, and integrity. "The argument from this is

that, in general, the creative person is above all a highly-developed person, and that educational programs can have an effect on such development in college" (Sanford, 1967, p. 204). In the late 1950s Sanford was touring Eastern Europe, and he said, "When in Russia I suggested to various Soviet professionals and officials that as the living standard in their country rose, and as long as the heavy emphasis on education continued, young people would be increasingly disaffected and deviant. (And, of course, creative, though I didn't mention this.)" (Sanford, 1968, p. 188-89).

Perhaps the nationwide strikes and demands for free labor unions in Communist controlled Poland during August of 1980 is an example of what Sanford suspected would happen. Recent Soviet educational literature gives an emphasis to the notion of creativity and is not hidden: "What does the quality of professional training of a specialist mean? The answer would seem clear: a specialist must know more, his knowledge must be deeper and more lasting, and his outlook must be broader" (Beliaev, 1976, p. 89). The creative element could be a hidden and unknown threat for the so-called Communist block countries.

But how can creativity flourish? In 1927 Joseph Wallas provided an early description of four main steps in the creative process: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. These primary steps have been expanded in various ways. A popular modification of this process developed by Alex F. Osburn in 1939 is what he called brainstorming (Osburn, 1957). Silvano Arieti (1976), a practicing psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, provides a

good summary of the major theories of creativity development along with other insights, some quite complex, in his book, Creativity: The Magic Synthesis.

Jack A. Chambers completed a study for the National Center for Educational Research and Development in 1972 titled "College Teachers: Their Effect on Creativity of Students." Chambers indicated introversion, dominance, and self-sufficiency as being associated with creativity for teachers and researchers. He said there are clear-cut behavioral patterns that differentiate teachers who facilitate creative development from those who hinder it. According to Chambers' research, encouragement through individual contact is found to be the most important aspect of student-teacher relationships affecting creativity. Creativity seems to be enchanced by a climate of indulgence, safety, friendliness, and cooperation (Dentler, 1964). Robert Nisbet (1975) warns that we may be losing our creative drives.

Creative students may find it most difficult to conform within institutional settings. "...there are indications that high creativity may be associated with unusual degrees of introversion and with certain kinds of high anxiety, as well as with flexibilities of imagination that are quite disabling in regard to high efficiency and freedom from oscillation in routine performances" (Cattell and Butcher, 1968, p. 272).

Creatives tend to make deviant scores on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory; this is reflective of the complexity

of personality, candor, lack of defensiveness, and openness to experience and not a genuine personality distortion (Ausubel, 1968). "Unconventional people are likely to give unconventional responses to diagnostic test items and thus obtain scores indicating the presence of psychopathology" (Bereiter and Freedman, 1962, p. 577). It has been found that creative professionals (scientists, architects, and novelists) were prone to give unusual responses to word association tests and that unusualness of mental association was one of the best indices of an individual's originality in professional work (Hudson, 1966).

The close relationship between mental illness and creativity has been well documented (George Pickering's Creative Malady, 1974, is a good example). VanGogh at the height of his career cut off his ear, then committed suicide; he was a schizophrenic. Many who achieve distinction are hypomanics with mood swings from one of energy, exuberance and confidence, to one of the reverse. "Freud was an example. Such people are quite sane, and, as long as circumstances do not press too hard, are in no danger and often achieve great things....Plato thought there were two forms of delirium - insanity and inspiration." (Pickering, 1974, p. 26 and 285).

The identification and study of talented students accomplished by Wallach and Wing (1968) gives emphasis to self-initiated activities. "As soon as one looks outside the classroom for evidence of talented accomplishments or attainments, rather than simply looking within the classroom at academic achievement, one

finds the student's general intelligence status singularly unrevealing as to who is more likely to exhibit the superior performances. Instead, the clues are provided by information about the ideational resources of the person - something quite different from intelligence" (Wallach and Wing, 1969, p. 127). There seems to be compelling evidence for predicting future creative behavior from past creative behavior (Holland and Nichols, 1964; Richards, Holland and Lutz, 1967; Hocevar, 1979).

Reading and study skills teachers might consider their own behavior and the behavior of their students from the creative perspective. Knowing when and how to administer professional knowledge is part of an effective creative task. Some research indicates socially and emotionally maladjusted students often have higher creative potential than socially and emotionally adjusted students (Finch, 1977). But it is most difficult to identify the proper educational strategies for creative people.

Teaching a skill requires technical knowledge, but students frequently reject the technical as being inhuman and alien to their unique needs. The techniques of reading and study skills may indeed be rejected by creative students. It takes a resourceful person to teach and promote creativity all at the same time.

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